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Veterans Administration

Your Job and the Psychiatric Patient

Department of
and Surgery

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Your Job!

AND THE PSYCHIATRIC PATIENT

Veterans come to our medical centers for many reasons. Some come because they are ill, in pain, or disabled. Some come because they are depressed, worried or show disturbed behavior. It is estimated that up to one person in ten suffers from mental or emotional disorders serious enough to require professional attention. Simple emotional disturbances are a part of everyday life, and these reactions to the stresses of day to day living are perfectly normal.

When disturbances continue on and affect behavior, it is no longer just an upset but an indication of mental or emotional illness. Mental or emotional illness can be regarded in the same way as physical illness. [Mental and emotional illness have definite causes, upset the system, and make people behave abnormally. Treatment and care are required and when these are made available, improvement or recovery may be expected.

Everybody needs kindness and friendliness. Everyone wants to be treated with patience and understanding. When you are sick you want it more than when you are well. The person who is mentally sick wants and needs affection even more than the person who has bodily pain. They may not seem to notice you or turn to you, but that, too, is part of their illness. Inside of themselves they know if you are friendly and it helps them.

Understanding on your part can keep minor upsets from becoming worse. It can help with the recovery process. The psychiatric patient has many fears and may be hostile.By being natural, putting the patient at ease, and listening you can assist the therapeutic team.

Everyone whom the mental patient sees or hears can help—not just doctors or nurses or attendants. Volunteer workers are important members of the "team" for they bring to the mental patient a feeling of contact with the outside world.

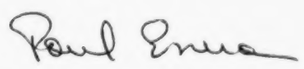
It helps patients to feel that life can be worth living and the world isn't such a bad place after all, if they feel that everyone around is friendly and patient.

No matter what your work, you are a member of a team. This team is doing its best to give every veteran who comes to your medical center the best possible chance to get well. If you have no direct duties with patients, you may not talk more than to say "good morning" or "good night"—but the way you say it makes a difference.

FOREWORD

Your job in the medical center makes you a member of the medical center team. Even though you may not have direct responsibility for medical care and treatment, your performance on the job can either help or harm patients with emotional or mental illnesses.

This booklet sets forth a few reminders on how you can help the mental patient get well. With understanding, friendliness, and kindness toward our patients, you can make your job not only self-satisfying but far-reaching in helping the mentally ill veteran become useful to others.



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You will be doing your part if you remember that:

1. The mental patient is a sick person and does not behave that way "on purpose."
2. Being cross or impatient can make the patient worse.
3. Be natural—if asked tell who you are and what you do.
4. Speak quietly and naturally.
5. Put the patient at ease—talk generally—do not use words like "nut" or "psycho." Words like these hurt a person's feelings, whether or not they show it.
6. Your part of the teamwork is to be patient, kind, and as helpful as you can.

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